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ENG 4950-001: Literary History

Stephen Swords
Eastern Illinois University

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Literary History Spring 2009

Stephen Swords Coleman 3020

sswords@eiu.edu 217-367-6253

Office: Tuesdays and Thursdays 11-12, 2-3:30, and by appointment

Texts for the class:

Barbara Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible*

Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*

Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*

Bessie Head, *When Rain Clouds Gather*

Doris Lessing, *African Laughter*

and several movies to be determined.

Rules and regulations:

1. Attendance counts. A students are in class all the time, ready to go with the reading and the discussion.
2. Participation counts. It's what we do as English majors. A students share ideas, respond to other people's ideas, and generally get into the game.
3. Reading deadlines count. Everything hinges on reading the text, being there for the movie, keeping up with things. A students do this, as well as read ahead, setting a reading schedule that works for them.
4. The final grade for the course will be based on your daily performance in class and the quality of your final project.

Literary History Personal Bibliography Project

The project overall is intended to enable you to take an inventory of the work you have done as an English major, primarily here at Eastern, but in other relevant contexts and settings, as well—what you've read, what stands out to you one way or another, ways you've grown and developed as a student of literature and writing, where you might want to take this sort of thing in the future. People have told me many times over the years that this project really does accomplish all that, and though they might not have thought so when the assignment was first introduced, by the end of it, they realize its value and found it an interesting experience altogether.

The project has two parts:

The List

For this, you need to pull together a list of what you've read in your courses in college in English classes and if appropriate, other relevant courses (film, creative writing, women's studies, history, etc.) We are talking individual titles of poems, stories, plays, novels, films, comic books, what have you. Often, people have included significant reading from high school or things they read on their own; in general, you want your list to reflect as much as it can of your experience as a reader. Your aim here is reasonable comprehensiveness, meaning you might miss a few things in the end, but your goal at the start should be to recall as much of what you've read as you can. This is not as hard as you might think, and over the years, people have come up with various ingenious ways to prod their memories into action. Working together is perfectly okay for this part of the project, and I can suggest some other strategies, as you get into the project.

For each title, you also need to include the author's name, his or her birth and death dates, and the date of publication for each title. Various issues will come up along the way about how to find and date things which we can talk about, but this basic bibliographic information, while tedious maybe to collect, will enable you to get a grasp on a lot about your reading history.

Once you've collected the titles and dates, you'll then need to organize the list in some meaningful way. People have done this in many ways, from straight class by class or chronological, by genre or period, or in some fanciful way of their own. Deciding how you want to present the list is something that comes later than sooner in the project, so I wouldn't worry about that now.

The Paper

The paper is where you reflect on what the list suggests to you, commenting on specific texts, specific reading experiences, etc., etc. Consider it an autobiography of your reading life. Always these papers have been really interesting to read, and people tell me intriguing to write, though you won't know what to say until you are saying it. More suggestions about the paper and the process overall will be forthcoming, but this is a project to get started on now rather than later. The list takes time, and the only way people have ever blown this assignment is by starting too late.